

Governance Committee
26 JULY 2017

Present: Councillors: Michael Willett (Chairman), David Coldwell (Vice-Chairman), Toni Bradnum, Karen Burgess, Peter Burgess, Philip Circus, Leonard Crosbie and Matthew French

Apologies: Councillor: Roger Clarke

Also Present: Councillor: Nigel Jupp

GO/9 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th June 2017 be approved as a correct record.

GO/10 **DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

GO/11 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman:

- Welcomed Councillor Karen Burgess, who replaced Councillor Tricia Youtan following her appointment to the Cabinet, to her first meeting of the Committee.
- Reminded Members that Ben Bix, Governance Project Manager, was leaving the Council at the end of the month to take up a permanent position with Eastbourne and Lewes Councils. The Committee congratulated him on his appointment and thanked him for the significant contribution he had made in respect of governance issues during his two years with the Council.
- Advised that agenda item 6 on changes to the Constitution had been withdrawn and a further meeting of the Committee would be called in due course to deal with this matter.

GO/12 **REVIEW OF THE CHANGES TO GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS INTRODUCED IN 2016**

Mr Paul Kornicky addressed the Committee referring to his statement at the previous meeting regarding the lack of any public consultation on this issue. His statement also suggested that consideration should be given to how the public could hold the Council to account with particular reference to the provisions within the Council's Constitution regarding questions by members of

the public at meetings of the Council. The Chairman indicated that a response would be given to Mr Kornycky's statement at the next meeting.

Following the approval of the Committee at its last meeting of the use of a questionnaire to conduct a Member review of the effectiveness of the governance changes introduced in 2016, the review had now been carried out and a summary of the results was submitted. The Committee was pleased to note that almost two-thirds (64%) of Members had responded.

The quantitative findings, which tested the five desired effects of: Member involvement; efficiency; accountability; timely decision making; and openness, all indicated that Members considered the governance changes had resulted in improvements.

The qualitative findings from Members' free-form comments were summarised and categorised as follows:

Endorsement – A number of comments had been made that supported the quantitative findings that Members had experienced an overall improvement in the areas of Member involvement, efficiency, accountability, timely decision making, and openness.

Information – Several comments indicated that Members considered that insufficient advance information was given in respect of issues to be discussed at the various Policy Development Advisory Groups (PDAGs) and it was therefore proposed that there should be a more structured approach to the publication of PDAG agendas, as set out in recommendation (ii) of the report.

Attendance – Comments had been made regarding poor attendance of some Members. Attendance at meetings was a matter for individual Members and not something that could be addressed by the review.

General – A number of individual comments regarding number of meetings, availability of information, meeting recordings and use of technology had also been made. Some of these were addressed by recommendations (iii) and (iv) in the report. It was noted that audio recordings of all Council, Cabinet and committee meetings held in public would now be broadcast live and subsequently published (subject to room and technology parameters). With regard to technology matters, Members were encouraged to work with officers to resolve any issues they had.

Members of the Committee discussed the findings of the review. They expressed particular concern regarding the poor attendance at meetings of some Members and noted that later start times for some meetings during the previous year had had no discernible effect on attendance by either Members or members of the public. The Committee noted the importance of PDAGs as 'private thinking space' for Members and a sounding board for Cabinet Members in the development of policy. The advisory and non-decision making nature of these groups was also emphasised. However, it was agreed that the

availability of clearer information both before and during the meetings of PDAGs regarding the issues to be discussed was important.

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report and agreed that a further review in 12 months' time to ascertain whether Members' concerns had been addressed was required.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the findings of the governance review be endorsed and supported.
- (ii) That, in future, each Policy Development Advisory Group (PDAG) agenda item will be:
 - (a) Described, in sufficient detail to make clear its purpose, on the agenda front sheet; AND
 - (b) Where appropriate a paper explaining the topic and covering relevant issues will be circulated to PDAG members in advance of the meeting; OR
 - (c) Where appropriate a slide presentation will be given by officers, and the slides will be circulated to members of the PDAG thereafter.

The decision on whether option (b) or (c) is appropriate will be for the Cabinet Member following discussion with the relevant senior officer(s).

- (iii) A Forward Plan extract, listing all forthcoming key and non-key decisions within that Cabinet Member's portfolio of responsibilities, will be re-introduced as an agenda item to note at PDAG meetings.
- (iv) The frequency of meetings of the Community and Wellbeing, and Housing and Public Protection PDAGs will be reduced from six to four per annum.
- (v) That a further Member review of the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements be undertaken in 12 months' time.

REASON

To satisfy council resolution CO/96 (27.4.16) that the changes to the governance arrangements introduced in 2016 be reviewed.

GO/13 **CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION OF HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Report withdrawn.

GO/14 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no matters of special urgency to be considered.

The meeting closed at 6.24 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN